

Appleby Archaeology Group

At the November meeting the Appleby Archaeology Group learned more about the Romans in Cumbria from Gerry Martin, Carlisle Archaeology Unit, who spoke about recent archaeological discoveries at Frenchfields near Penrith and Castle Green, Carlisle.

At Frenchfields two fields to the north of the A66 were studied. Nothing was removed from the site as there was no digging, but everything that was seen was recorded. The topsoil which had been removed to expose parts of the site was later replaced to preserve the archaeology.

Aerial photography had indicated a road and rectilinear structures. The Roman road which was up to 8 metres wide, running east to west on the line of Scotch Corner to Carlisle was located with evidence of buildings on either side. The buildings on the north of the road appeared to be of a higher quality than those on the south. Was this because they faced south? Ditches were identified which could have been field boundaries. In the field nearer the A66 remains of walls, cobbles, flagged yards and roads were seen as was a well preserved cesspit which had been backfilled with blackened sandstone, which could indicate that the area was cleared by fire. A modern land drain was removed which enabled the archaeologists to look at the

stratigraphy. Only surface pottery was found dating to 2nd-4th centuries.

Gerry explained that a possible interpretation of the site was that it was the vicus for the nearby fort at Brougham. The site shows no evidence of later occupation.

Gerry then explained that in contrast the five millenium excavations at Carlisle Castle Green, are rescue archaeology prior to development. Material is removed as the archaeologists dig down through the layers enabling them to gain insight into the occupation of the site over a period of time. Everything is recorded for future reconstructions.

These excavation have provided information about the size and location of the Roman fort, some of which lies beneath the medieval castle, and of its continued use throughout the centuries.

He mentioned that there was some evidence of pre-Roman occupation and occupation during the Dark Ages. There appears to be continuity of use with the Roman substructures lasting into the early Middle Ages. The Anglians probably adapted what was there to there own use. There is more evidence of medieval activity; ditches 15m wide and 6m deep were found separating the castle from the city. In a smaller ditch there was well preserved revetment of posts and wattle. Massive post holes were found which might indicate the supports for a bridge. Posts dividing off the

medieval properties could be seen, and there were signs that a medieval road ran over the Roman via principia.

Gerry spoke in detail about the Roman occupation.

The original fort built 73-74 AD was built of wood but there is evidence of a complicated sequence of building. There may then have been a period of abandonment perhaps at the time of the Scottish campaign before stone foundations were laid. It seems that there was a massive reorganisation of the fort at the end of the 2nd Century

The timber buildings were well preserved and are dated 73-105. This was illustrated by slides of floor timbers, wattling with the remains of plaster, foundations of timber buildings, drains made from oak and alder and a water pipe supported at points by cobbles to ensure its gradient. Other organic material was found including quantities of tent leather, shoes and the base of a barrel.

The via principia running east to west was located. This road appears to have continued in use to the 11th century. Remains of the headquarters buildings, the principia were identified. An inscription on a stone suggests that it was built by the 6th Legion. This building would have been at the centre of the fort. Over the centuries modifications were made, for example a hypocaust was added in the 4th century.

Remains of the barracks consisting of regular cells were found on either side of the dual carriageway; some rooms had flue tiles indicating some comfort for the soldiers. A 2nd century smithy was found beneath the barracks which tests suggest this may have been a finishing area for metal work.

Before taking question from the floor Gerry said that strategic position of this site has meant that it has been an important location over the centuries.

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